Note by LMB: I have no memory of/this/place of why or for what I wrote this. It seems to belong with the Eos blog posts in support of *The Sharing Knife*. (12/2/06)

Dialect and Dialogue...

Ah, I'm so glad someone noticed, if only subliminally. (Actually, subliminally is preferred; intended, even.)

All of my books so far are in a viewpoint dubbed variously tight third, third person personal, and other variants. That means they are written, more or less and to the limits of my ability, attention, and endurance, in the vocabularies, dialects, and personal styles of their respective point-of-view characters, rather than that of some separate omniscient narrator.

Within that frame, any given sentence may be written in one of three narrative distances, roughly, from that of the viewpoint voice. Direct quotes–dialogue and italicized internal dialogue, which are the character's thoughts directly reported–will all of course be in that character's own words (and grammar). Paraphrased thought–the stream of observation and sensation the character is experiencing, and the reader along-with–will be in something closer to standard English, but salted with the character's personal style and opinions. Sometimes, especially during narrative transitions where the writer must hike up her skirts and run quickly from one fully-dramatized scene to another, it will be more standardized still, but preferably with some flavor of the POV (and their limits) lingering.

If a given book of mine is written in a single viewpoint, there is no way for the reader to tell where the character's style leaves off and the writer's begins, as it's all the same from end to end. In multiple viewpoint, more variation is possible, and visible.

Each book's writing style is therefore both driven and constrained by the viewpoint character/s selected. Miles's voice is post-modern, ironic, and educated, and he has access to basically all the vocabulary I do. Cazaril is educated and exposed to if not steeped in his language's poetry and theology, although with a strong side-order of military, man's-world experience. Ista has the education and vocabulary of a Chalionese court lady, broadly overlapping Caz's, upper class and literary. Neither have access to modern vocabulary or world-view detritus–all the psycho-technical b/a/b/b/l/e vocabulary Freud, er, gifted the language with, for example, is beyond their purview, nor should they use any metaphors stemming from modern technologies. The characters' ages will also often be reflected in their language–more formal for the older or more powerful ones like Aral, more breezy for fellows like, say, Ivan.

Ingrey is based on a different root language (in his world) than that of Caz or Ista, as well as having a very different personality. His background is upper class for his realm, but he's not literarily inclined. I tried to make his language more terse and direct to reflect this, while still keeping an archaic flavor. (And, of course, the usual time-and-place-and-tech-level vocabulary control.)

One runs into limits as a writer, and sometimes has to just give up and go with the standard English that one's readers can parse, or be stripped of words altogether. The world of Chalion, ferex, never had the medical theory of the four humours, nor much of our medieval astronomical or astrological (or alchemical) terminology, but I still use such words as choleric or sanguine or saturnine for that world; they have the proper archaic flavor.

I am at best a toddler-writer in these matters. In Tom Shippey's book *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* he has a wonderful analysis of the Council of Elrond identifying something like 23 different nested dialogue styles, each with distinct vocabularies and grammar. But that's Tolkien.

All this as preamble to *The Sharing Knife*. Because *TSK* is written in dialect; several of 'em, in fact. My native dialect, to be precise–or what would be if my parents hadn't been from Pittsburgh via California and a lot of formal speech training–that of rural Ohio (and points nearby).

Fawn's voice is rural central Ohio pretty directly, as are the rest of the crew from West Blue. The Lakewalkers speak in a slightly more formal and educated variant of the same thing, as befits their more powerful status, although Dag's unique tag "leastways" is clearly something he picked up in Luthlia. We also dip into the Appalachian-tinged syntax of southern Ohio, at the Horseford's farm. Later, in the third book, I have a major character who speaks that dialect exclusively. The narrative remains in dialect as well, though with the usual shift to something more standard during transitions.

Vocabulary control was tight. Both Fawn and Dag are, as we see, literate (tho' Fawn only barely), but neither have a speck of the literary about them, except what they've picked up from listening to song and ballad. (And traditional song and ballad also tend to strong, simple language, because the ear can't parse complex terms at speed.) Neither Fawn nor Dag are readers, because there's almost nothing to read in their world. (Save for what's in Lakewalker lore tents and patrol reports or village clerk's records, all of which tend to the utilitarian.) So neither should have highly polished, polysyllabic, literary vocabularies.

Both should have very extensive technical vocabularies, however, dealing with the work of their daily lives. Fawn could leave the average reader in the dust on weaving tech or the diseases of sheep, I have no doubt, or Dag on the arcana of trapping or the

treatment of skins and hides. But these don't much come up in the course of the book, nor have I any special wish to bombard the reader with esoteric research unless it's directly pertinent to the critical parts of the plot (as, ferex, the spinning in Ch. 17).

Invective is a little weak. Naturally I had to throw out most religion-based invective from our world. The Lakewalkers have only a few unique words and phrases. The farmers ought to have all the earthy Anglo-Saxon monosyllables, but I've left most of them out in order to maintain a certain tone in the midst of some very mature subject matter. (Too, both my POV characters are rather clean-mouthed by nature.)

I probably used my on-line thesaurus more with this book than with any other I've ever written–to find simpler but equally precise synonyms for the polysyllables that tend to fall most trippingly from my typing fingers. I suspect the practice of paying such close attention to my language was good for me as a writer; I know it was fun.

Ta, L.